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Leland Monson
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Dictation from the Moon

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Poetry

by

Leland Monson

B.A. University of Nevada – Las Vegas, 2017

May, 2020

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Abstract

Much of my poetry concerns twelve-step recovery, brushes with suicide, and other related incidents. With more poetry coming out, there was more recovery and other influences. Some manifested themselves through imitation. Sometimes they came through form. Sometimes inspiration manifested through language. Some came from goodness knows where. An accumulation of all of it, each poem follows one or more of these guiding principles.

Key Words: recovery, suicide, homelessness, New York school, Greek myth, New Orleans

Preface

In his poem “what makes,” Charles Bukowski’s persona is asked what a makes a writer, “‘well,’ I said, ‘it’s simple, it’s either you / get it down on paper or you jump off a / bridge’” (lines 12-14). Until about seven years ago, I was not getting “it down on paper,” so I had at one point “jump[ed] off a bridge.” With my recovery, poetry came out. With more poetry coming out, there was more recovery. Along with the larger-than-life Mr. Bukowski came other influences. Some manifested themselves through imitation. Sometimes they came through form. Sometimes inspiration manifested through language. Some came from goodness knows where. An accumulation of all of it, each poem follows one or more of these guiding principles.

Much of my poetry concerns twelve-step recovery, brushes with suicide, and other related incidents. “Prelude to a Forty-seven Page Epilogue,” the first poem in the manuscript, sums up at least twenty-six years of my life. The last full stanza ends on an upbeat note of what current events are like. My experiences of homelessness inform “Slumming & Snipes” and “Poetry, Georgia.” A poet is nothing without something to write about. Near the end of the collection, “Pope Jan” concerns how twelve-step recovery led me back to school. The last poem, “finish here,” concerns my suicide attempt. At least for the moment, suicide is something I can apply my dark humor to, as I do in “Duplex for Bob Kaufman.”

While introducing me at a reading, one of my classmates tried to convince the crowd my favorite poet is Frank O’Hara. Admittedly, I do like Frank. I imitate his work with “The Day the Queen Died” and “The Busiest Seven/Eleven in the World,” both New York Schoolish. However, I like others even more. While not strictly an imitation, “Poetry, Georgia” is heavily influenced by Deepstep Come Shining, by C.D Wright, from which, among other things, I stole the idea of a mythical town name. I had content but not form for that poem until I read Wright’s

book. Though somewhat tangential, “A Survey of Modern & Postmodern Poets, & How They Figure to A Contemporary One” relates here in that I compare my potential writing lifespan to other poets'. Granted, it is more homage, albeit strange. “Duplex for Bob Kaufman” is an adaptation of the nonce duplex form invented by Jericho Brown, which draws inspiration from the sonnet, among other forms. Brown is also the inspiration for the more conventional imitation “Pope Jan” was inspired by one of Jericho Brown's poems in his first book, *Please*. I suppose Homer (and Alexander Pope, for his translation) earn a nod for supplying the story for “Andromache.” “Elegy for Spicer (Imaginary)” is inspired by Jack Spicer’s own *Imaginary Elegies* right down to the epistle-like ending.

Bashō is the sole impetus for the two haibun herein. The older one, “Slumming & Snipes,” was, like “Poetry, Georgia,” a marriage of content with form; once I discovered the form, I knew where to put the words. For “The Narrow Highway to the Deep South,” the material and form came together nearly at the same time.

There are a number of syllabic poems, starting with “Andromache.” I adapted it from The Iliad, and the syllabic form is 9/8/5/7 for each quatrain. Other syllabics include “The Map to Golgonooza,” an adaptation of a prose paragraph, and homage to William Blake, which follows the pattern 7/7/5/2/4/5; “Composed while Reading Pleasures of the Damned” which includes five-syllable lines; and “Elegy for Spicer” (4/8/4/5(3/2)).

My imitation of Clifton’s “begin here,” “finish here,” started as a syllable-by-syllable copy and soon turned into the slightly shorter poem it is now. After cutting two lines from a draft, I made the phrasal couplets conform to a syllable count: five, six, seven, and seven, yet another regular nonce syllabic form. Then, while looking at the fourteen-line poem, I immediately thought, “sonnet.” Then, I noticed an accidental rhyme scheme (abbcdbebfbgcbbbb),

largely due to a repeated word (a single letter rhyme at the “b,” and the “c” as well). I had invented a nonce form—eureka!

A number of the poems defy the notion of having ancestors. Though “Andromache” is obviously derived from Greek epic, some of the given circumstances of it are invented by me. Similarly, “Abandon All Hope of Having a Better Past” is in syllabic form (five each), but is an allegorical, biographic riff on existence. The poems “Bugs of Southeastern Louisiana” and “Breakthrough” are just hyper-local meditations on my current environment. I am a fan of Bob Kaufman, and it would hardly be right if, while here in the town where he was born, I did not explore some aspect of him. So, for two hours or so, I walked where he had walked, writing “RUE MIRO 2019,” the longest poem of my relatively brief, interrupted career. It turned out to be not only a dialogue with the poet, titled after his poem, but also other parts of his life and work inform the content.

I consider eight poems, more than a third of the poems here, to be elegies, most of them syllabic. I sit down, get a repeating pattern, and go. It is like dictation, for now I will blame the moon. Also, the elegy “Slim & None” was inspired by things my father has said over the years, culled from my sister’s and my memory. I have been told it offers “no consolation,” but will constantly remind me of the depths I can go, as do the others. “It’s simple,” says Hank Chinaski, Bukowski’s persona from paragraph one. So, here I am, getting it down on paper.

Prelude to a Forty-seven Act Epilogue

The fog was rising once upon a time
That's just the weather in Elysium
I don't remember any prior lives
No one can go & do a check for me
But Gallifreyans maybe Doctor Brown
I do not know the math that makes that work
I cannot see beyond the dark of night
I'm now approachable & still alive

My head is full of stuff that did not work
I don't come up with good ideas in snug
Refrigerator wombs, benign & safe
Before I saw a tyrant held me chained
I only needed you to exile me
I saw a dream tiptoe across your brow
Capricious god, astrologer of doom
I'd rather take dictation from the Moon

Anonymous, a concrete bed I made
Nowhere to go, remember how it was
Remember how it feels to sleep outside
All night behind a store I slept with crows
A suicide of words I made a plan
As once upon a time my mental health
Made me a hermitage of one I had
Not plotted any murders save my own

The hearse disperses once upon a time
An intervention from the universe
Ensured my kidneys would not stop for death
The only way to win is not to play
I only want to write, engage the Mage
It's all intentional attention paid
For what remains let all our fears depart
I'm now approachable & still alive

That's just the weather in Elysium

Slim & None

If ever something were impossible
or at least unlikely
(the parameters varied),
Dad would make it clear
that there were
exactly two chances:
slim & none.

Is that right?
was Dad's go to phrase for anything
with a tinge of obviousness to it,
specifically
the blatantly obvious.
The joke became
"Mr. Monson, you have two seconds to live."
"Is
that..."

A common extended family activity was nickel ante poker
for Dad a useless hand was
paregoric
"a pair o' nothing."

he shone
he was sunny
no shade

Dad diagnosed me as "Hyper-kinetic" before any doctor.
I was prone to having *a conniption do-dangle*
and fall right in the middle of it.
Still do, now & then.
Dad was a noted proponent of corporal punishment
prior to that medical conclusion.
The beatings ceased after it.

Dad had been known to expect compliance in the
extremely immediate future
a nine-syllable stand-in for
"now."

The closest Dad ever came to an F-bomb was
lord love a duck.
His only profanity (typically "shit") came
after some damage he had done to himself
or during fights with my sister.

he shone
he was sunny
no shade

My sister is now his guardian.
He has been diagnosed with some form of dementia,
his mind gone all
paregoric.

Now, all he has is the
extremely immediate future.
LORD LOVE A DUCK!

he shone
he was sunny
no shade

So, what are the chances he recalls he has a son?
exactly two.

Poetry, Georgia

Reported to be West of Rome, Georgia.
Not much West of Rome that ain't Alabama.
No doubt guarded by an angel with a flaming sword.

The light of that flame keeps me up at night.

I slept just north of Paradise, Nevada, on a concrete slab shared with a black widow.
'Charlotte' was there first, so I let her stay
or she let me stay.
That's the serenity to accept things.

Put a little love in your heart...
"If you have five bucks, I will let you suck me"
Shake the snake awake
Now he knows an old poker player with no teeth.

I lived south of Paradise for nine years,
with a different widow.
It was my geas to keep her in the manner to which she had become accustomed.

*Down the drain, like a goldfish at its funeral,
Like a coyote hanging in mid-air, holding a HELP sign,
Like Gollum, hunting for the one snipe,
They adore the acquisition of ventilation.*

That's poetry, Georgia, sweet Charlotte.
No angel guarding Paradise.

When your roommate has eight legs and crawls on you at three AM, you evict her.
It's only then that you have the nerve to do it.
That's the courage to change things.

Down the drain.

I lived eighteen years with that other widow who happened to *be* black.
Then she threw me out for the second time.
I stayed gone.
That's a little wisdom to know the difference.

Now, I live *in* Paradise with megaresorts.

Where the light of the flame
doesn't keep me awake.

Slumming & Snipes

Warmed by two summers
A concrete slab my mattress
I made do with that

I found a place near my twelve-step meeting room, an electrical box on a concrete base with just enough room for me to lay down. A few times, someone beat me to my spot, so I lay nearby. On one such occasion, I woke to find the squatter gone, so I reclaimed my spot.

I slept undaunted
A secure space to my left
Bag, shoes, and backpack

Learned early to sleep shirtless, later to sleep shoeless. It was trial and error. I prefer sleeping on my right side, but sleeping on my back worked best, no pressure on my shoulder. I toyed with configurations of pillows, positions, and linens. Eventually, I had to put something under me, pants usually, because of my back sweating. Every few days, I would change before bed; it was secluded enough at night for privacy.

By some friendly flies
And the sun of summer, bright
Awakened at six

Because of the sun, I was unable to sleep much past seven. Plus, I had no desire to be roused or cited for vagrancy or trespassing. The cops and the people who had the store I slept behind knew I was there. I was left alone. Only once stolen from, my Tootsie Roll stash.

I set the alarm on one of my cell phones, to be up around seven. One morning, I let it snooze, and some lady on the sidewalk lambasted me to shut it off. Couldn't she just keep walking? I lay on. Eventually, she left.

Three hours to kill
Raiding the local ash trays
For quality snipes

Snipes: cigarette butts that still have some meat on them. Many places to look. Days, I would hit the plaza I slept at, Fashion Show and Boulevard Malls, and the casinos. The casinos are serious. You learn to be sly.

Shower every week
Whether I need it or not
Laundry every two

I smelled usually, as I have been informed. I would go to the day shelter at St. Vincent's shelter, usually Saturday, to shower. They supply a returnable towel, shave cream, a razor, soap, and shampoo. People in my program helped with cash, for laundry, occasionally a bus pass. I had

to walk most of the time, the trip to the homeless corridor the longest four miles away in the summer.

There was a gentleman's club just west of the strip that had coupons for free drinks. I would sojourn there some wee hours on my cleaner days. I sucked up some A/C, scored some snipes, and enjoyed the company. A couple of the ladies even took me on the tour of the VIP skyboxes once. It was nice to have the social interaction, even under false pretenses.

On the Western side
Found another box and slab
My 'vacation' home

The experience lingers. I still put off showers, still indulge in the occasional snipe, and still hoard things, like napkins. Back in the day they were eyeglass cleaners, general hand and face wipers, emergency toilet paper. When I cannot sleep on the futon my friend gave me, I sleep on the floor. Some urge overwhelms me, to be uncomfortable, to remind myself.

Abandon All Hope of Having a Better Past

The steps black & brown
solid rough-hewn worn
from wind & rain &
feet thump when mounting

There is one landing
about halfway up
Stairs' apex hidden
by green foliage

The bluff at this spot
just yards from the sea
is too sheer to climb
any other way

The rails creak & sway
bearing any weight
Foregoing the rails
seems the safer way

Safer still to stay
on the beach or go
the long way around
might take thirty years

Pope Jan

You'd remember
us sitting in the same club
at the same twelve-step meeting,
you in the corner chair
controlling the climate,
well, the thermostat,
responding to another relapse with,
no doubt, "whatever,"
your shortened version
of the third great prayer:
Thy will be done.

You'd remember
a trio of first anniversaries
separated by relapses.

Finally, you'd
lifeguard
pulling me up,
before I went down
a third time.
Kept me out of the deep end,
until my sponsor taught me how to swim.

Now, I have five years,
pushing six,
sick with recovery.
We should sing
"happy birthday" to me
anyway, at the same time:
you in your afterlife,
me with my only life, here.

Though it hurt something awful,
days before you left us – me –
I made you laugh twice.
I consider that
a job well done.

The Busiest Seven/Eleven in the United States

In memory of Carl

I.

My first human contact of the day, after struggles with age, gravity, breakfast, among other things before class, was Seven/Eleven for coffee

There would be “Joe”

really Carl

but his name tag said, “Joe” & he looked like one, as I suppose any guy looks more like a Joe than a Carl

Anyway, Carl would sell me a coffee for the refill price in my refill mug only after I swore it’s a refill by raising my right hand,

Another clerk, Tony, repeated “A refill, I swear” back to me

Carl though was the one that started the whole raising the right hand thing.

Carl (and Tony) charged me for my refills every time, while Swing shift, not so much

More about Swings, shortly

One guy, close cut grey hair

name escapes me, married to a lady on Swings (don’t recall her name either)

Would wave me through for free

Anyone who gives you free coffee should have a name

I will work on that

& that one lady

white hair... no idea

And two guys, one with dark hair... nope... & one with a push-broom moustache, Gary the

HMFIC, wears a St Louis Cardinals t-shirt, under his unbuttoned uniform shirt, casual & color coordinated, a boss I like

Swings was two ladies, typically, one guy, relief (don’t recall their names)

& Rita

First time I saw Rita in a day we said, “What?” to each other

Tradition!

Second time she’d say, “You again?” as I said, “Me again?”

We worked out a third encounter exchange, but neither of us remembers it

Two guys share Graveyard shift, & I don't see them enough to know names
I'm an ex-Graver, no names needed

Anyway... Swings

Saw them the most, usually a free refill, but I was always ready to pay, & I'd get a new Super
Big Gulp™ cup every week or so

I make them charge me when it's a new Super Big Gulp™ cup

I have standards

Rita waves me through or 'forgets'

LadyMarriedToTheDaysGuy claims that the button is broken she quit once, came back, quit
again

II.

Rita was the one that told me that Carl died
Fall my senior year

One day, well before then, I broke a jar of Ranch Dressing
offered to pay via Carl
"Don't worry about it"
"Don't do it again"

Replaced him & the Lady with three guys

One of the guys didn't last long
pissed *everyone* off

& two more guys whose names I didn't know

I should have known all their names

That May graduation day I went in for coffee in my own, one-use red uniform no reaction other
than smiles

just another day

I worked convenience store & other late night retail, "yep, done that"

the show goes on

Three months later I loaded up the rental car off to New Orleans bought coffee in two refillable
cups that I still had & put them on the counter in front of that Days Guy

He's Matt

M.A.T.T. like an anagram

Running nametag joke like Carl AKA "Joe"

He waved me through

We Real Dorks

THE FANTASY ROLE PLAYERS
SEVEN AT THE COMIC HUT

We real dorks. We
Fight orcs. We

Dig caves. We
Roll saves. We

Play late. We
Don't date. We

Watch Dune. We
Shower soon.

Duplex for Bob Kaufman

After Jericho Brown

Bob says, “the Ancient Rain is falling again.¹”
When I answer what I am writing²

(The Rain blurs the pages while I am writing)
“The Great American Suicide Note.²”

Lots of damp American suicide notes.
Everyone trying to get it just right.

All that competition means I just write.
There are volumes of my wet suicide notes

With elaborate annotated footnotes.
I would die for them to see the light.

I could just let each page dry at City Lights.
They must be perfect before I check out.

Why would I ever need to check myself out?
Bob said the Ancient Rain is falling again.¹

¹ “THE ANCIENT RAIN” Kaufman

² “BONSAI POEMS” Kaufman

The Narrow Highway to the Deep South

-August Eighth: I filled up my two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

I said goodbye to the Seven/Eleven crew. I figured out the GPS. Eight hours of driving over four days at 60 MPH. I-40 had a speed limit of 70; I went 75. I had not driven in four years, but it was like getting down off a duck. East of Albuquerque a simple green highway sign: Continental Divide.

Been thirty-six years
away from Continental
Divide's sunrise side

-August Ninth: I filled up my two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

I could have driven a little longer per day, but that would have meant two days in Texas. So I stayed in far East New Mexico & far West Louisiana. In Arizona, New Mexico, and Louisiana, I-40 came down to residential level quite a bit, less so in Texas. Hours & hours of flat nothing. I entered Texas. At the border was a (corporate?) cattle ranch. My family farmed, so I know the smell of manure.

First sniff of Texas
quality fertilizer
never smelled so rich

-August Tenth: I filled up my two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

The disadvantage of starting out in the wrong direction in Texas is that it will be a while before you can turn around. I had to get my refills up the road. Even the GPS couldn't figure out the twisty exit. So, I got to listen to her say, "recalculating" for twenty miles. A jam near Arlington (?). Took me about forty-five minutes to get through it with no hint of overheating. An hour out of Louisiana, I found a timely rest stop. Made the sleep-over stop in Natchitoches. I don't recall the towns in New Mexico & Texas.

Natchitoches in the
verdant Bayou State land of
the Spanish mossed trees

-August Eleventh: I filled two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

Four hours to the "river" side of Lake Ponchartrain, leaving two hours to spare to get to a compulsory meet & greet for the Creative Writing Workshop. Wending through New Orleans made it almost five, and nearly another hour to get a money order. I found the venue just in time, after changing my shirt. All through more humidity than I had experienced in thirty-six years, if ever.

Out of the desert
to enough humidity
for a rainy day

August Twelfth: To the airport & back to return the rented hatchback.

I anticipated radio silence during large parts of the trip. Surprisingly, I found classic rock almost the whole way. There were convenience stores for morning coffee, & McDonald's almost always handy (thank you, Joan, for the gift card). I returned the rental car to MSY, the return to campus three hours by bus. Luckily, before I started back, I returned to retrieve my graduation tassel that I had hung from the mirror for the trip. I told the woman who got it back for me, that it cost me twenty grand.

Bugs of Southeastern Louisiana

Bugs, Mr. Rico. Zillions of 'em. – *Starship Troopers*

I noticed the dragonflies first
I'm sure they show
on NORAD's RADAR
I am six-foot-four
We have had
what is called in air traffic control
"near misses"
I understand they don't sting
& mostly eat other bugs
I can appreciate that

Next I noticed the cicadas
I was unaware that we had any
in Las Vegas
A friend assures me we did
Though I guess they are quieter there

Here they are full-throated
They no doubt revive Broadway shows
"One (two, three, four)
Singular sensation..."

Maybe even communicate with the mother ship
in the Delta quadrant
calling down an airstrike
that will take a few light years to arrive

My other friend in California
doesn't want to know about the bugs
New Orleans teems with
The thought of them gives her nightmares

I have proof of mosquitoes
beyond the ones I catch in the act
They are generally darker
& shorter winged
than the ones I've known

All the tiny spiders are here
& some more

They are very industrious
I walk past light poles
with no anchor structure
within ten feet
& I will still run into a web

Then there are the grasshoppers
I think

I met one with a Day-Glo green head
& coffee colored body
with exceptionally long back legs
& mantis-sized forelegs
but still grasshopper-*ish*
or grasshopper-*y*

I took note
& went back to reading
until it landed on my knee
I gently scared it off
“Look
I will share the neighborhood
but you can’t be crawling on me”

Now I’m talking to bugs
the conversation entirely one-sided
yet satisfying
in a weird sort of way

Breakthrough

I was able to throw a balloon across the Mississippi River. John Bel Edwards saw me do it. It was filled with xenon gas. That's why it worked. The buoyancy of amazement. I did it on the deepest darkest day & did a cartwheel after. Stretch saw me do both things & put them in this poem. A week from Tuesday, I will do the same with a balloon filled with neon. I am that close to perfecting it. The key is chromium, chromium balloons. One day, all these chrome balls will come galumphing back. "Frabjous!" Stretch said to me. He had shared the secrets of trans-river balloon propelling lore with me. Before my xenon/chrome balloon majestically soared over Lake Pontchartrain.

Andromache

My love Hector visits Troy today.
The nurse of our young son told me.
Cassandra told her.
Cassandra just knows these things.

It seems he could come home more often
With the war just outside the walls.
I should not complain:
This war could be leagues from here.

I have the nurse bathe Astyanax,
While I bathe and perfume myself
For greeting Hector
In the city's high tower.

If Hector wanted to see us both
He could have just come to the house,
But the nurse reports
He comes to us way up there.

That post overlooks the battlefield.
Maybe that is Hector's plan.
I go there often
Trying to glimpse my lord's plume.

So up Astyanax and I go.
I should not call the baby that
Around his father.
Hector would be scandalized.

Astyanax, our neighbors call him:
'The Defender of the City,'
Like Hector's duty,
My little prince's nickname.

Our son is Scamandrius, named for
Ilium's defending river.
We will play the game
As if we were still courting.

I will wail as the abandoned love,
Hector pleading as ardent mate
Then, holding his son,
Will give a father's kisses.

The siege returns Hector to the field
The defender of the city,
And I will go home,
Scamandrius to a nap.

I must recall to use his real name
When I see Hector on that tower.
Nurse says there is talk
My princeling will not be King.

He is son of the heir apparent.
Of course, he will be king in turn,
The same for his son
For as long as Troy's walls stand.

It vexes me to hear such stories.
I ask Nurse where she hears them from.
From that Cassandra!
But what does Cassandra know.

Golgonooza's Cartographer

William Blake was an odd duck
obscure poetic genius
*Blake was never mad
enough
to be locked up*
A.E. Housman said

You should not call Blake mystic
While making Golgonooza
those voices he heard
(Spicer's
own were *Martians*)

Even if they were
genuine emanations
(heed spectres spirits angels
daemons or *Martians*)
they are
active beings
Poetic Genius

Blake was never committed
While making Golgonooza
Blake had his daemons
had his
Holy Spirit
& that was enough

A Survey of Modern & Postmodern Poets, & How They figure to A Contemporary One

I decided to be a poet
when I grew up
at fifty-one.

John Keats started at *twenty*-one
died at twenty-six of TB
a five-year career.

They tested me when I was a kid
& TB isn't a thing like it was then
So, I made it past the five years.

What if other poets began like
William Cullen Bryant,
prodigies at age ten,
& wrote poems until they died
how long do I have to go
to match their longevity?

Prodigy Wilfred Owen
died at twenty-five
fighting in World War I,
one week before the Armistice;

that would be fifteen years after age ten.

I am too old to draft
or volunteer for that matter.
If I can avoid war zones
and mustard gas
I have a chance.

Can I go until
I am sixty-six?

Sylvia Plath died at thirty-one,

making twenty-one years from ten.

I tried suicide once.
It didn't care for me.
I'll have to stay vigilant.

Can I go until
I am seventy-two?

Frank O'Hara died at forty,
run over by a dune buggy
on Fire Island.

That's thirty years
he wrote after age ten.

If I look both ways
and sleep in protected areas,
I can avoid accidents.

Can I go until
I am eighty-one?

George Oppen died at seventy-six of,
well, being seventy-six.

...minus ten

Can I go until
I am one hundred-seventeen?
Wouldn't that be nice?

George Oppen
sometime around age fifty
after twenty years of doing other things
started composing poetry again
(sounds familiar)
& at the age of sixty-one
won the Pulitzer Prize.

I can make it to sixty-one.

Poem starting with a Line from “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota”

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly.
Bronze cannot be so aerodynamic.
Though aerodynamic planes are metal.
Metal designed properly can float.

A flotilla of battleships is tons of metal.
Metal, that in another form will sink.
I would be sunk if I tried to design one,
As would those foolish enough to sail it.

The design of the first sail was surely an accident.
Accidentally hung linen moved the boat
Toward the end of an unedged earth,
An Earth that had no edge to fall off of.
No edges to a sphere, or, rather, an ellipsoid.

...meanwhile there is that butterfly
Butterflies, like sails, use the wind,
Or the wind works against them like with bees.
Bees should not be able to fly,
But they do fly those do-bees.

Composed while Reading *The Pleasures of the Damned*

The professor asked
What we were reading
So I said Bill Knott
Charles Bukowski
& Montaigne's essays

One of my classmates
Said they didn't like
Bukowski I said
Well he doesn't care
Because he is dead

I don't like Plato
T.S. Eliot
William Wordsworth or
Ezra Pound & they
Are past caring too

But even if he
Hadn't passed away
(He'd be ninety-nine)
Charles Bukowski
Really wouldn't care

Elegy for Spicer (Imaginary)

Stammering is
the native eloquence of us
fog people, Jack
The fog is
 rising

All elegies
are imaginary, Jack, none
of the dead can
hear them through
 the fog

but you knew that
The dead don't write you back because
no post office
past the fog
 Hell, Jack

you won't hear this
but please tell Lorca I say hi
enjoy your death
& the fog
 Love, Lee

The Day the Queen Died

It's about 11:30 in New Orleans on a Thursday
Four days before the Fall semester
Yes it is 2018 & I will go get a cup of coffee
I will catch the 6:30 55 bus
to get to the monthly Dogfish reading at 7:30
weather permitting

I walk across the muggy quad
& it's sunny
for now

Even if I go to Dogfish
it's up in the air if I will read or not
Even if I don't
I will see what some of the other poets in New Orleans
are doing

The barista smiles while she gets my coffee
as I insist on telling her
"biggest cup you have
regular hot coffee
room for cream"
an order she already knows

As I carry coffee to the library's river side
to the only working outside outlet
I think about which book I'll read
on the bus & whether or not to have a po' boy
from Eat @ Melba's before the reading

I log on to Facebook
& the Dogfish page has posted
"The Voice of God"
a poem dedicated to Aretha Franklin
as elegy

& I am sweating a lot from New Orleans in August
& thinking of a lyrical by Frank O'Hara
& a lyric by Steely Dan
& listening to 'Retha belt out lyrics
as only she could

I guess I will be reading this first draft at Dogfish

RUE MIRO 2019

I start walking N Miro,
Seventy-seven years or so
Since Bob Kaufman walked it.
From Elysian Fields to Canal,
Two-point-one miles.
Thin slabs of sidewalk
Nearly overgrown by grass,
Bob Kaufman's childhood domain.

Bob liked to tell how
Dad was a German Jew
Mom a voodoo Queen
From Martinique.
He was begat by
A half-Jewish, half-black Pullman porter
& a local school teacher.

At the 2020 block,
I come upon a spectacular
Stand of bamboo:
An Urban Lot Primeval.
Fenced off
So I couldn't get closer.

I settled for the picture:
"Bamboo with Mailbox
& Old Tire."

At the next block,
An Annette Street address
The Miro Street School,
Now Valena C. Jones Elementary,
Would have been there when Bob was.

The historical marker says,
Established 1918
Renamed for Jones 1923,
A black woman.

Bob would have been five
In 1930,
Surely they would have
Let Bob attend.
(Did you go here, Bob?)

One of the first things
An editor of his poems
Told me was about Bob's
'Buddhist' vow of silence
After JFK's assassination.

Fenced in & dilapidated
Like Mt Carmel Baptist Church
Across the way,
Jones Elementary stretches
From Annette's corner
All the way to N. Galvez,
A huge New Orleans' block.

Somewhere nearby
Was Mom's (unofficial) Kaufman Library.
Bob's mother would raid
Estate sales for their
Poets and drama.

Till the end of
LBJ's folly
(Two parts Vietnam,
One part Nixon),
Bob ended his ten-year silence,
Reciting poetry
Of two sorts in San Francisco
(I hope you climbed up on a table, Bob).

Mona Lisa,
The Scholar Dr Saloy,
Theorized Bob's memory
Eidetic, commonly 'photographic.'

Bob, on that day in '73
Quoted Thomas Becket
From *Murder in the Cathedral*
By T.S. Eliot, of all people.
I long thought he had recited
Shakespeare's *Sir Thomas More*
Followed by something his
Eidetic memory composed
During the Buddhist vow.

Sweating, I find myself over-dressed
for New Orleans, again.

At Saint Bernard
Bear left.
First though
I'll rally my hunger
& cool down
At Rally's.
Obviously not there
When Bob was,
1925 until '42,
Give or take.

Next,
While making my own
Neighborhood poem project
I come upon the Neighborhood
Story Project
Corner of Miro
& Lapeyrouse.

Then there is a high sign
Sharing *LOVE*
At 1513.

"WOULD YOU WEAR MY EYES?"
Bob asked long ago
(I'm on it, Bob).

At 1449 I find a tree
Vs. sidewalk collision
The tree won,
Earthquake-like.
Another clash at 1435 & 7,
The sidewalk wins,
For now.
These oaks were surely
Around when Bob was.
They don't need ID.

At Miro & Dumaine
There's Phillis Wheatley
Charter School.

Between Orleans &
Lafitte Greenway (la-di-da),
Quite possibly at one time
"Galvez Greens."

The trees,
So young,
Not even close
To winning any ground
From the sidewalk,
So young.
Well-trimmed lawns surround
Copy-cat apartmentcondohomes.

So, the Vietnam War over
And his vow,
He began with
“They speak better than they know,
And beyond your understanding...”
& ended with his own
[All those ships that never sailed].

The other side of
The Greenway,
From St. Patrick
To Bienville,
Is not so gently used
& people wander out
Between games.
The Saints play later.

No Saints in Bob’s time,
Save those
Already in general use.

Beyond here
Is the final approach to Canal St.
& its STOP *LIES* sign.

Two-point-one miles
& two hours later
Wet with sweat
Taking pictures along the way

& miles to go
(& an entire Saints game)
Before I sit
At Parkview Tavern
& miles to go before I sit.
(Did you memorize
Any Bob Frost, Bob?)

In 2025,
For his Centennial
I want to recreate
Bob's performance
Somewhere
(If I can, I'll even climb
Up on a table, Bob.)

I'll take the streetcar from here.

finish here

After Lucille Clifton

finish with the shade
stretching to the East
wait
finish with a mickey
like bullets in a gun
wait
finish in a hidden copse
where a body's hard to find
wait
finish lying on a slab
which will happen anyway
wait
just
wait

References

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VITA

The author was born in Clifton Springs, New York. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Multidisciplinary Studies from University of Nevada – Las Vegas in 2017. He joined the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop program to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree as a poet.